

APPENDIX G

Characteristics of Successful Objectives

APPENDIX G

Characteristics of Successful Objectives

Identifying and articulating appropriate objectives for the “refocused GILS” is essential. One approach, adapted from Total Quality Management, identifies five aspects in articulating objectives: Specific, Measurable, Accountable, Realistic, Time-Phased. The deployment of TQM and its associated requirements for expression of organizational mission statements and policy has given rise to this mnemonic device called “SMART.”

The aspects of SMART objectives outlined below can be contrasted with current language of goals, objectives, purposes, and expectations in GILS policy. The GILS II initiative can refocus the goals and scope for GILS, but that is just the first step. Policy, as articulated by OMB, then needs to be translated in SMART objectives.

- **Specific:** This characteristic provides focus, or an ability to visualize a clear outcome or planned state. Definitions must be operationalized and understood (but not necessarily agreed upon) by everyone that is expected to participate. Examples of nonspecificity in OMB Bulletin 95-01 that have hindered GILS implementations to-date include:
 - “public information resources”
 - “automated information system”
 - “...all departments and agencies in the Executive Branch” [and] “Independent regulatory commissions and agencies”

The lack of specificity in just these three items alone limit one’s ability to envision GILS outcome or a state of requirements satisfaction. The record aggregation issue also is consequence of nonspecificity, as is the confusion surrounding the concept of “US Federal core” locator records. OMB Bulletin 95-01, FIPS 192, and the NARA *Guidelines* fail to specify precisely what these are and what purpose they serve beyond that of “non-Core” items.

- **Measurable:** If progress toward an objective can’t be measured, it won’t be accomplished. It goes hand-in-hand with specificity; if something can’t be visualized, it can’t be broken down into recognizable/countable units. The objectives of GILS have not been measurable. For example:
 - “Assistance” in obtaining the information and “help” the public and agencies are goals not easily measurable (or at least the instruments are not available to, trusted by, or usable by the implementors). Such goals need to be described in terms of measurable criteria.
 - “improve agency electronic records management practices” [and] “agencies’ abilities to carry out their records management responsibilities and to respond to Freedom of Information Act requests”—what are the benchmarks? “Improvement” implies they are known.
 - “...agencies should inventory their existing holdings and institute adequate (how to measure “adequate”?) information management practices. To the extent practicable (how is practicality measured?), agency GILS should contain automated links to underlying databases to permit direct access to information...”
 - “Reduce (to what level?) the information collection burden on the public by making existing (at what point in time?) information more (how much more?) readily available for sharing among agencies.
- **Accountable** – Policy states that the “head” of each agency is accountable. But for what? The “head” of any organization is always accountable for everything. With the lack of agency management support identified through the study, agencies may have missed the boat here by not specifying responsibilities and authorities in the chain of command. Also, “Independent regulatory commissions and agencies are requested to comply” automatically abrogates accountability.

- **Realistic** -- One tenet of realistic modeling is precedent, which agencies may be lacking in areas of IRM and RM in the evolving networked environment. “Realistic” can be contrasted with “reasonable.” The original vision of GILS might have been reasonable, but was it *realistic*?
 - Is centralization or decentralization or some hybrid model realistic?
 - Information dissemination product means “any book, paper, map, machine-readable material, audiovisual production, or other documentary material, regardless of physical form or characteristic, disseminated by an agency to the public.” This scope (“any”) may be reasonable, but *realistic*?
- **Time-Phased** -- The key here is the concept of “sufficiently frequent cause for celebration or reflection.” OMB Bulletin 95-01 has several “phases” for the objectives of GILS, but without co-incident S-M-A and R. During the study, no participants suggested that any celebration or reflection occurred on making an OMB Bulletin 95-01 deadline. Objectives need to be associated with specific time frames for their accomplishment.

An example of a “SMART” government-wide objective for GILS implementation might have been:

By January 1, 1996, the manager charged with agency GILS implementation in each Cabinet Department and Executive Agency listed in the *1996-97 Government Manual* shall mount on the agency web site, or on GPO Access, a metadata record comprising Title, Abstract, Order Process, and Point of Contact for their 10 most frequently-requested printed publications.

Implicit in this is the idea that, in an empowered culture, the S-M-A-R-Tness gets stronger with every link in the organizational chain—i.e., “granules” of responsibility become apparent. In the above example, the Public Information Officer, for example, would recognize that his/her contribution is to identify the popular resources (and that if he/she doesn’t already collect the data that he/she had better have it by a date negotiated by the team); the webmaster allocates *n* bytes; etc.

The lack of S-M-A-R-T objectives for GILS could be simply a reflection that at the outset the philosophical mandate for GILS was unclear. *It will be necessary to pinpoint as closely as possible who wants what and why from the refocused GILS.* That understanding, and necessary buy-in by the agencies, could ease the development of S-M-A-R-T objectives for the “how.” Further, the accomplishment of the objectives should lead to tangible benefits to the agencies.